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Message Text

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ACTION ARA-14

INFO OCT-01 EUR-12 IO-13 ISO-00 CIAE-00 DODE-00 PM-05
H-01 INR-10 L-03 NSAE-00 NSC-05 PA-01 SP-02
SS-15 USIA-06 CAB-02 COME-00 DOTE-00 EB-08 FAA-00
LAB-04 SIL-01 /103 W
----------108085 041228Z /10
R 031940Z MAR 78
FM AMEMBASSY PORT OF SPAIN
TO SECSTATE WASHDC 2099
INFO AMEMBASSY BRIDGETOWN
AMEMBASSY CARACAS
AMEMBASSY GEORGETOWN
AMEMBASSY KINGSTON
AMEMBASSY LONDON
AMEMBASSY OTTAWA

AMCONGEN MONTREAL
AMCONGEN TORONTO

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E.O. 11652: N/A
TAGS: EAIR, ELAB, TD
SUBJECT: GOTT STATEMENT SHEDS LITTLE LIGHT ON BWIA'S FUTURE

REF: PORT OF SPAIN 683 AND PREVIOUS

1. FOLLOWING CABINET MEETING MARCH 2, A GOTT STATEMENT WAS DELIVERED WHICH REFERRED ONLY TO TRINIDAD AND TOBAGO AIR SERVICES (TTAS), THE AIR LINK BETWEEN THE TWO ISLANDS, AND DID NOT RPT NOT CLARIFY GOVERNMENT'S INTENTIONS VIA-A-VIS BWIA AND ITS STRIKING PILOTS. BULK OF STATEMENT CONCERNED INTERIM MEASURES TO BEEF UP TTAS, SUCH AS SUPPLEMENTING THE TTAS FLEET WITH BWIA'S THREE DC-9S, AND HIRING PILOTS AND CREW FOR THOSE AIRCRAFT ON SHORT-TERM CONTRACTS. BWIA
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PILOTS COULD BE SECONDED TO TTAS PENDING RECRUITMENT AND/OR TRAINING OF NEW PILOTS. CABINET ALSO INSTRUCTED SPOKESMAN (PADMORE, MINISTER IN MINFIN) CATEGORICALLY TO REFUTE ALLEGED RUMOR THAT PILOTS ON FOREIGN AIR-LINES WOULD START BOYCOTT OF T&T ON MARCH 6, A CURIOUS TWIST SINCE NEITHER THE MEDIA NOR ANY OF EMBASSY'S SOURCES HAS REFERRED TO SUCH SPECIFIC

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ACTION.

2. PADMORE ALSO ANNOUNCED THAT GOVERNMENT IS TAKING STEPS TO DECLARE AIR SERVICES AN "ESSDUTIAL SERVICE" IN THE MEANING OF THE INDUSTRIAL RELATIONS ACT, AN OMISSION WHICH HAS CLOUDED SOME OF LEGAL ASPECTS OF THIS DISPUTE. IT IS NOT LIKELY, HOWEVER, THAT THIS ACTION WOULD HAVE ANY IMPACT ON COURT CASE ALREADY IN PROCESS.

3. COMMENT. GOTT STATEMENT DID NOTHING TO CLARIFY GOVERNMENT'S POSITION OR INTENTIONS IN BWIA INDUSTRIAL DISPUTE, WHICH HAS DOMINATED MEDIA AND PUBLIC ATTENTION FOR PAST MONTH. THE STATEMENT, WHICH GIVES EVERY APPEARANCE OF BEING VINTAGE ERIC WILLIAMS, MAY BE INTENDED TO STRENGTHEN IMPRESSION THAT GOTT WILL NOT BE INTIMIDATED BY PILOTS, AND SEEMS DESIGNED TO PUT ADDITIONAL PRESSURE ON ALPA TO KNUCKLE UNDER, AND, AT THE SAME TIME, TO TRY TO SPLIT ALPA BY LURING SOME PILOTS INTO FLYING FOR TTAS. FAILURE TO MENTION BWIA WAS REPORTEDLY DUE TO FACT THAT GOVERNMENT IS AVOIDING COMMENT ON CASE BEFORE THE INDUSTRIAL COURT.

4. SECGEN OF T&T LABOR CONGRESS (CARL TULL), WHO HAS BEEN ENGAGED IN MEDIATION EFFORTS BETWEEN BWIA
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AND PILOTS, TOLD LABOFF MARCH 1 HE DID NOT EXPECT EARLY SETTLEMENT OF BWIA PILOTS'S STRIKE SINCE DISTANCE BETWEEN MINIMUM SOLUTIONS EACH SIDE COULD ACCEPT AT PRESENT WAS STILL GREAT. TULL CALLED STRIKE MOST DIFFICULT AND COMPLICATED ONE HE HAD EVER ENCOUNTERED HERE, AND WOULD NOT HAZARD A GUESS AS TO WHEN OR HOW IT MIGHT BE RESOLVED, ALTHOUGH HE DID NOT RPT NOT BELIEVE THE CURRENT RUMORS THAT BWIA WOULD GO INTO LIQUIDATION.
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Message Attributes

Automatic Decaptioning: Z
Capture Date: 01 jan 1994
Channel Indicators: n/a
Current Classification: UNCLASSIFIED
Concepts: UNION GOVERNMENT RELATIONS, AIRCRAFT PILOTS, LABOR STRIKES
Control Number: n/a
Copy: SINGLE
Draft Date: 03 mar 1978
Decaption Date: 20 Mar 2014
Decaption Note: 25 YEAR REVIEW
Disposition Action: RELEASED
Disposition Approved on Date:
Disposition Case Number: n/a
Disposition Comment: 25 YEAR REVIEW
Disposition Date: 20 Mar 2014
Disposition Event:
Disposition History: n/a
Disposition Reason:
Disposition Remarks:
Document Number: 1978PORTO00708
Document Source: CORE
Document Unique ID: 00
Drafter: n/a
Enclosure: n/a
Executive Order: N/A
Errors: N/A
Expiration:
Film Number: D780099-0509
Format: TEL
From: PORT OF SPAIN
Handling Restrictions:
Image Path:
ISecure: 1
Legacy Key: link1978/newtext/t197803109/aaaadotu.tel
Line Count: 104
Litigation Code IDs:
Litigation Codes:
Litigation History:
Locator: TEXT ON-LINE, ON MICROFILM
Message ID: 778f24b9-c288-dd11-92da-001cc4696bcc
Office: ACTION ARA
Original Classification: LIMITED OFFICIAL USE
Original Handling Restrictions: ONLY
Original Previous Classification: n/a
Original Previous Handling Restrictions: n/a
Page Count: 2
Previous Channel Indicators: n/a
Previous Classification: LIMITED OFFICIAL USE
Previous Handling Restrictions: ONLY
Reference: 78 PORT OF SPAIN 683
Retention: 0
Review Action: RELEASED, APPROVED
Review Content Flags:
Review Date: 29 mar 2005
Review Event:
Review Exemptions: n/a
Review Media Identifier:
Review Release Date: n/a
Review Release Event: n/a
Review Transfer Date:
Review Withdrawn Fields: n/a
SAS ID: 3125184
Secure: OPEN
Status: NATIVE
Subject: GOTT STATEMENT SHEDS LITTLE LIGHT ON BWIA\'S FUTURE
TAGS: EAIR, ELAB, TD, BWIA
To: STATE
Type: TE
vdkvgwkey: odbc://SAS/SAS.dbo.SAS_Docs/778f24b9-c288-dd11-92da-001cc4696bcc
Review Markings:
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Markings: Sheryl P. Walter Declassified/Released US Department of State EO Systematic Review 20 Mar 2014